**MIND THE GAP: Expectations, Ambiguity and Pedagogy within Art and Design Higher Education**

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**Introduction**

This chapter explores the nature and impact of student and tutor expectations and identifies a number of gaps between them that offer particular pedagogic challenges. Commonly these gaps are attributed to student failure to adapt or understand the challenges presented to them within the art and design HE environment however we would argue that in not accepting the responsibility to provide a 'safe' transitional framework, we may be failing some students.

There are a series of transitions that art and design students must negotiate as they move between the compulsory and post compulsory education sector and between higher education and employment within the creative industries sector. These transitions are key points where gaps in expectations become evident and where we as educators need to undertake further work to support our students as they enter and exit further and higher education.

Students entering higher education often seek 'clarity', but a central, although largely unspoken, tenet of art and design pedagogy would appear to be the centrality of 'ambiguity' to the creative process. However, the fact that this value is implicit rather than explicit in our teaching practices creates vagueness and insecurity for many of our first year students who have expectations based on the concrete and the certain.

Art and design pedagogy is concerned with the importance of students interacting with open-ness and uncertainty to enable them on graduation to negotiate the complex and unpredictable demands of the creative industries. The kind of knowledge that art and design deals with is procedural, provisional, socially constructed and ever changing.

There are few laws, formulae and tangible content lists that form a visible curriculum. In the creative industries practitioners and consumers construct what is appropriate, new and innovative. The pedagogies of art and design relate to these kinds of knowledge; where many 'right' answers exist and where there is difficulty in articulating in advance what an appropriate response might look like. 'I know it when I see it'.

In constructing this argument we have to consider both the evidenced and perceived range of expectations held by both students and their tutors. As Raphael Samuel proposed in 'The Myths We Live By' (Samuel and Thompson 1990), our perceptions form 'truths' which are as powerful as the 'facts' we gather. And certainly in this debate we are very aware of the power of these myths in the forming of academic practices in art and design.

We note a tendency in certain sectors of higher education to problematise this difference in expectations between tutors and students in terms of the students. For example we have to 'manage their expectations', as if by constructing the student expectations in a particular way prior to entry to further and higher education students will no longer be disappointed or expect the impossible. We would like to begin by inverting this assumption that the student is to be managed, and problematise it by examining our own preferred pedagogic approaches instead.

**Context**

Tutor, student and industry expectations exist in, and are constructed by, our social and political contexts. The group writing this chapter comes from the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Israel and our thinking is constructed in the context of cultures and policies in these countries. It is worth noting however that, while higher education in Australia and New Zealand largely share the same origins as the UK, Israeli HE seems more rooted in mainland European traditions and now operates more of a mixed economy model where there are art and design academic programs within universities as well as a significant number of semi-private HEIs which are more explicitly market driven. We also come from various levels of education; from FE, undergraduate, postgraduate and from different sizes and types of institutions, different regions as well as countries and so offer a diverse picture of higher education.

Contemporary policy drivers include the increasing importance given by governments to measures of student satisfaction. In the UK the National Student Survey (NSS) has sent a shudder through the art and design sector as a result of our poor performance in comparison with other disciplines. In Australia the well established Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is now linked to funding so that 'good teaching' (as measured by the CEQ) is one of three weighted measures, along with graduate destinations and retention rates, used to decide the distribution of the Learning and Teaching Fund, (worth just under 35 million pounds in 2007). In New Zealand there is some discussion of moving to a national student satisfaction survey and currently each New Zealand university has a student satisfaction evaluation process at the end of each paper (module/unit) with staff performance in this system linking closely to promotion prospects. Arguably the rise of the student satisfaction survey, at least in the UK, is a result of concerns about the ability of HE to deliver satisfactory education in a context of increasing student numbers and declining resources.

For the last 20 years or so we have also been operating within an audit culture (Power 1994) where experiences that are complex and nuanced are conflated with the measurable. Tools for measuring student satisfaction become reifications of much more intangible processes and perceptions. Additionally there is an increased requirement and expectation that higher education will produce much more public information about its quality measures and achievements. This can be seen as a response to an increasingly consumerist approach from students and parents related to quite widespread western policies of moving the burden of cost of HE from the state to the private world of individuals and families.

There are tensions in this context. Government equity policies have increased institutional awareness of differences in access to, and experience of, higher education for diverse student groups. In New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi embeds bi-culturalism in the constitution. In Australia there are key performance indicators (KPIs) for percentages of both indigenous students enrolled and staff employed and targets around enrolments of students from socio-economically disadvantaged (low SES) groups. In the UK widening participation is a key policy driver. So there is a commitment at least in the discourse to address these issues. This is not only a top down driver. The increasing literature on higher education student access and experience in relation to

issues of power relations, habitus and social justice (see for example Archer et al 2003; Hayton and Paczuska 2002, Leathwood and O'Connell 2003, McManus 2006) is beginning to affect the discourse and thinking of the higher education sector. One hears much more now about the role of cultural capital and the socially constructed nature of aesthetics and taste (Bourdieu 1984, 1997) yet this awareness constantly bumps up against the context of mass higher education where there is still a strong element of selection.

At the other end of the education experience there is concern expressed by industry and government representatives that there is another 'gap'.

In the UK industry led skills development has been highlighted by the recent Leitch report, and is a central part of the government's strategy to further improve the UK economy:

> *"In the 21st century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential."*
> (Lord Leitch 2006, 1)

In the UK, the three Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) operating within this area (Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS), Skillfast – UK and Skillset), have highlighted their concerns regarding the mismatch of expectations from the large numbers of students studying art, design, media and communication and the appropriateness of the wide variety of courses available. A recent report from CCS indicates that design education in the UK has strong foundations, but notes concern of over supply and gaps in skills and knowledge:

> *"Industry and education need to work together to develop a positive strategy to address this apparent mis-match between the number of design graduates and jobs in the industry. Such a strategy must also address the fact that some new graduates do not have the right skills to meet industry needs."*
> (Creative and Cultural Skills Development Plan 2007, 25)

This report also indicates areas for improvement within the curriculum to ensure that graduates will have the right skills to meet their career expectations:

> *"A key area to address is the content of design skills in schools, colleges and universities. Design is a popular subject in secondary and tertiary education - so popular that there is an apparent 'over-supply' of new designers. This means it is necessary to make the value and transferability of design skills more explicit, while also providing excellent careers advice.*
>
> *As well as their core design capabilities in specialist disciplines, students will need complementary skills such as business management and communication, alongside experience of working in multi-disciplinary teams and knowledge of global markets and supply chains."*
> (Creative and Cultural Skills Development Plan 2007, 5)

This view is also supported by documentation from Skillset and Skillfast-UK, with the former, welcoming "the recommendations of the Leitch Review and its endorsement of the Sector Skills Councils and the industry-led approach to tackling skills and training issues". Skillfast-UK clearly indicates that the expectations of employers are not being met, noting:

> *"Employers express reservations concerning the skills held by many design graduates and question the industry relevance of some courses. This reflects employers' general concern that young people lack a proper understanding of the sector and the career opportunities it offers."*
> (Skillfast-UK 2006, 3)

Whilst in some contexts the SSCs do acknowledge that education in the UK has been a major factor in the success of the Creative Industries, their focus on finding solutions to education and skills problems largely ignores the excellent examples of collaboration between courses and employers. Examples are not hard to find, with the majority of institutions keen to ensure that employers are invited to participate in the design and delivery of the curriculum. Centers such as the Fashion Business Resource Studio at the

London College of Fashion provide platforms for interaction with industry through work placements and industry sponsored student projects.

The rich educational experience offered to many of our students, with large numbers of tutors who are also practicing artists and designers, and with very ‘real’ learning experiences such as work placements in the industry or opportunities to work with industry partners in colleges is more than simply an experience focused on skills acquisition. Students are developing many kinds of skills and abilities; they are learning to become practitioners and what it means to be part of the creative industries. They are learning what Wenger (1998) would describe as a regime of competence allied to a context of meaning. They do not learn by rote or by formula, but by developing an understanding of the context in which work is made. What education in the creative industries does not provide is a specific training that will fit every student for the many and varied potential roles they will meet in those creative industries and nor is it possible to provide this in the context of mass education. We would argue that what art and design pedagogies can provide are ways to approach complexity, to maximise opportunities that arise for students in the work place and to point to ways to become successful practitioners. These approaches are based on what we might call our pedagogy of ambiguity, where skills are not simply competencies, but the ability to operate in the complexities of uncertainty.

**Dealing with expectations**

Expectations are basic human phenomena however we believe that both tutors and students hold expectations which are specific or more significant in art and design pedagogy. Amongst these we may identify the expectation to produce original artifacts, to graduate with sufficient skills, to become an innovative artist/designer who explores new frontiers or to realise the expectation of 'making it' i.e. becoming a star designer 'not like anything else that we have seen before'.

Institutions are expected to provide programmes which will enable the majority of the students to become successful practitioners, tutors are expected to coach and support them and graduates are expected to prove themselves worthy of becoming part of the creative industries. It is not difficult to see that gaps between these high expectations

and actual performance in the real world are almost inevitable as the following vignette demonstrates.

To illustrate the ‘gap’ between what is imagined by the student (what could or should have been) and the real world the student is facing, we offer a vignette based on an actual complaint. This vignette also illustrates the gap between student and tutor expectations. Since tutors have a unique role in art and design courses their intentions for and expectations of students draw much of the students' attention and ‘expectations gaps’ may lead to conflicts as in this case.

We would contend that the content of the narrative of the complaint and response is recognisable, in the context of this discussion, to the point where it stands as a pertinent exemplar, or case study, providing useful points for analysis.

**Vignette**

A student who had enrolled on a degree level fine arts course became distressed enough by his experience in the first few weeks that a complaint was lodged, by a parent, to the University Vice-Chancellor. In this complaint a number of interesting issues around what we are calling for the purposes of this paper ‘communities of expectation’, ‘pedagogies of ambiguity’, and ‘gaps’ or ‘transitions’, are revealed.

In the first instance we become aware of the expectations of a particular student, then those of his parent. In the next instance we become aware of the expectations of the tutor coordinating one of the modules. What is not illuminated, of course, are the expectations of the other students undergoing the same learning experience, who have either experienced it differently and positively, or for reasons to do with culture, class, gender, age, or a multiplicity of other factors, have not felt inclined or able to complain.

In a letter the father of a student introduced himself as a primary school teacher, shared the fact that his son had been studying at the institution for four weeks, and was only happy with one of the three modules he was studying. In that module, he explained, the tutors had demonstrated and explained techniques, and given the student clear instructions on how he might improve. ‘This’, he added, ‘is what we had expected of [your institution].’

He then went on to list what had occurred in the other modules that 'failed to comply' with their expectations. This list included the following points:

- *The openness of brief leads to little or no direction*
- *When students ask if they are on track they get no direct answer, therefore students are constantly unsure whether they are performing to standard*
- *i.e., no ongoing evaluation or critiquing of student work*
- *There appears to be no planning of tutorials, so a lot of time is wasted*

In these short statements we can see the expectation expressed by the father, on behalf of himself and his son, of a particular kind of pedagogy, one that might be characterised as assessment driven 'knowledge or skill gathering', where standards are explicit and non-negotiable and learning parameters are clearly defined.

The response from the tutor reveals quite a different perception of the experience and a radically different notion of appropriate pedagogy. This might be summed up in her response to the second bullet point above, where she wonders whether this may be:

> *"Because of the open nature of the brief and the desire of students to be directed. Students will often ask if what they are doing is 'right' and our response will be to explain that rather than 'right' or 'wrong,' we are expecting students to engage with the themes of the brief and develop a position in response to that engagement."*

At the crux of this is revealed the implicit 'pedagogy of ambiguity' held dear by art and design educators. We can easily argue that we base our delivery on a very current, student-centred, 'active-learning' approach to education. Open-ness of brief, where the student has to engage in active negotiation and problem solving would seem to be key in this approach, as is a more frequent use of modes of 'formative assessment' through informal discussion and critique. Essential to all of this is the often unspoken requirement that students experiment, take risks, learn to assess the appropriateness of solutions according to context, and engage in a longer and more open-ended process of enquiry than they may previously have been used to.

In this exemplar two, or perhaps three, sets of expectations clash. In the first instance, the expectation of the parent that his child will receive an education based on a particular kind of pedagogy. In the second instance, that the student will navigate through the difficulty of 'ambiguity' as a kind of initiation, which he will pass or fail based on his own strength of character. Finally, caught between these two positions, is the third expectation: that of the student. He finds himself conflicted between the explicit expectations of the father, and the tacit expectations of the tutor. What the student has the right to expect is that he will be given an appropriate learning experience *and* the means by which to negotiate that experience.

The failing this story illustrates is how often we do not succeed in making explicit to ourselves, or our students, the tacit pedagogic framework in which we function. Although, as the example shows, we value a 'pedagogy of ambiguity', we often fail to transition students from the safety of the 'concrete' or 'expected' to the ambiguous and contingent, in a way that makes them feel safe or enabled.

It is a minefield of good intentions, and just as we must be careful not to mythologise the 'ideal student'; one who is instantly comfortable with the equivocal and contingent nature of a pedagogy of creativity, we must also be careful not to mythologise and demonise the tutors who believe so strongly in an approach to learning that goes beyond 'right' and 'wrong'. What we do not want to suggest is that art and design pedagogy fails its students. There are many examples of good practice in the sector and a myriad of success stories. However, when it goes wrong, the failure is often based on an overestimation of a student's ability to access an unspoken set of values.

**What are students' expectations and what shapes them?**

Our discussions around what is the nature and impact of expectation has been diverse and wide ranging. Given that the contributors come from diverse backgrounds, interests and foci – albeit from an overarching commitment to investigating the nature of art and design education, what we propose here are a number of facets of a psychological, socially constructed phenomenon that is deeply human.

We define an expectation as a ‘belief about (or mental picture of) the future; anticipation: wishing with confidence of fulfillment; the feeling that something is about to happen’ (wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn). This can include things we are wishful of achieving for ourselves, expectations of other people or for other people and situations outside ourselves that we anticipate being a certain way at some point in the future. We can also include our perceptions of others' expectations of ourselves which may be the result of concrete information or our beliefs. Expectations are to do with the future, yet they are based on past experiences, and can therefore be seen as a link between past and future. They can focus on the future as being positive i.e. to aspire for a better situation for ourselves or meaningful others. It is also common to have 'negative expectations' (for example ‘I expect that this tutor will be late/moody/unfair’) or interestingly, a negative expectation might also be expressed as a state of no expectation (for example ‘I’m not expecting anything from the course’). Expectations can be based on ‘myths’, interpretation of external information and on similar past experiences. The attached positive or negative value of an expectation is particularly important as it has a tremendous effect on creating incentives or constraints for future possibilities.

From the multitude of interactions between the student and the institution, staff, other students, family and so on, it is clear that expectations (and whether or not they are met) can be considered as one of the key determinants in students assessing their level of success and quality of experience – whether that be the expectation of what higher education study will look like, how well the student will do, how they will grow and develop over the course of study, how they will relate to staff and so on – even as far as their level of satisfaction in completing the National Student Survey (or equivalent) as they prepare to complete undergraduate study. Given the centrality of expectations to the student experience, it is important to understand them and what informs them.

Student expectations are founded on a raft of shaping factors in their previous learning experience and in their own social worlds. They are based on prior personal experiences in other learning environments, acquired knowledge from external sources and they are very much constructed by social standards. These prior experiences are referred to by Biggs as presage factors and they influence the way that the learning process is experienced. Students have multiple goals and expectations with various foci; some might also be shaped by adopting others' (parents, friends, teachers) expectations.

Thus for the purpose of our discussion it may be more useful to consider the idea of 'communities of expectations'. These might be established by gender, ethnicity, culture, class etc. An example would be the student's common expectation of a tutor's impartiality, which may be based on the notion of democratic standards and prior experience in an earlier educational environment such as secondary school. We can therefore see that student expectations are not inert or completely individualised: they are constructed and evolving.

Prior experiences of success and failure are also a rich ground for expectations to emerge. The ways of working which brought praise before can drive students to build an expectation that the same way of working will attain future success. In the case of HE art and design courses, where students are often required to change their mode of operating and reconstruct their way of thinking, we often encounter the bewildered expression of those who no longer receive the accolades they have been used to receiving prior to their entrance to higher education. It is also a common phenomenon that work produced within a particular aesthetic context is no longer deemed to be acceptable in the culture of higher education. In the vignette outlined above, the expertise of the father as a teacher and collective experiences of his family of educational success, all formed the basis of the father and the student's expectation that he would be successful at university.

An additional source of expectations, which become even more dominant in the current information age, is the powerful imagery created by the mass media. These images of the successful designer or the 'star' artist may promote an expectation of becoming such an artist or designer, and seeing the art or design course as the golden path to attaining that position. Higher education institutions also play a role in creating these images as they frequently promote projections of perfection in the world of education through the prospectus, for example. The kind of marketing which is used to attract students may lead them to expect they will spend their time in the most up–to-date technologically equipped learning spaces with help available as and when they need it. Both tutors and students are held hostage to a partial vision of reality, which promises, as all advertising does, the vision of an experience (and the implied future career successes) that is there for the student if only they buy into or win their way into the particular institution of their

choice. This was evidenced in a review of prospectuses undertaken by the Design Skills Consultation. In this they stated that:

> *"After reviewing a total of 67 UK course websites, the design world came across as glamorous, fast moving, cutting edge and closely linked to industry and fun. If making a course selection based on the websites alone, a prospective student is likely to come away expecting good employment prospects in a highly attractive industry…There is no doubt that the impression given by the course websites is that of a highly attractive world with lots of opportunity for varying levels of success*."
> (Design Council and Creative & Cultural Skills 2006)

While not implying that courses are low quality, the report notes that such claims raise concerns about how the marketing of courses can become increasingly 'compromised' in the struggle, at an institutional level, to attract students and meet targets. Such claims may set the stage for students' expectations even before they enroll on a course.

There appears to be a paucity of research in the area of student expectations in relation to art and design education and as a result we have very little evidence of what students are actually expecting while they are learning.

Austerlitz (2007) identified while interviewing second year architecture students that they had expectations in the following areas:

- producing an original artifact of high quality (as seen in magazines)
- learning skills and being guided on the way to becoming a successful designer
- fulfilling themselves as creative and autonomous individuals
- being valued, supported, and respected by the tutor
- belonging to the student group and keeping up with its' standards
- becoming a successful member of the architects' community.

One of the central themes to emerge within students' expectations was around the tutors' role and behaviour. This is particularly important in one-to-one and small group tutorials where, owing to the very significant role of tutors in this learning environment, students develop high expectations regarding not only the tutor's level of expertise but

also the quality of their interactions and the kind of guidance they will offer. Webster (2001) refers to these kinds of expectations and drawing from research on the expectations of architecture students notes that they had constructed an image of an 'ideal tutor';

> "…*when students were asked about the 'ideal' role of the design tutor in one-to-one tutorials they referred to: 'giving assistance with managing and planning work', 'being enthusiastic', 'understanding the problem from the students' perspective', 'accepting the student's ideas and helping to develop them' and 'offering design guidance which the student understood*'". (pg.109)

In art and design courses students rely on their tutors for guidance and for evaluation of the quality of their work. Following on from this, it is assumed that what students perceive others (and particularly their tutors) expecting of them, has a direct impact on a student's performance and on the expectations that the student then places on him/herself. Such experiences enable students to reconstruct their expectations of themselves, which in turn either motivate or de-motivate them.

As expectation is always in relation to a future state of being, students will be (whenever it is possible) aiming to bring about desirable situations and to avoid damaging or undesirable situations. Yet hopes and expectations are not often accurately fulfilled. At times we surprise ourselves by achieving more than we had expected, but probably more often than not we do not feel we have fulfilled all our expectations. This suggests that at some point in the future, *someone* will be held responsible for the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of the expectation.

Vroom (1964) asserts that there are three conditions which need to be in place for expectations to be met:

- **Valence** – value of obtaining the goal – what's in it for me?
- **Instrumentality** – connection of reward and success. Is there a clear path for me?
- **Expectancy** – perceived probability of success – what is my capability?

Vroom argues that all three must be present for motivation to occur. That is, if an individual doesn't believe he or she can be successful at a task or the individual does not see a connection between his or her activity and success or the individual does not value the results of success, then the probability is lowered that the individual will engage in the required activity. From this perspective, expectations are seen as an important facet of students' learning as they influence the level of a student's motivation, underlie and maintain their social interactions and affect their interpretation of events. Research into architecture students' experiences shows that they are constantly appraising the extent to which their expectations have been met, as well as monitoring their situation according to what should be and what actually is.

Our experience shows that in many cases students come with hopes for a breakthrough into the art and design world and expectations of being led gradually by a supportive, yet inspiring tutor towards a triumph. This idealised image of success and the tutor's role in achieving it creates the potential for a significant gap between expectation and reality. The vignette given earlier demonstrates such a gap - between the expectations of the student and their father, and what actually happened.

When a gap is revealed it is a human tendency to look for causes and responsibilities. Rotter's 'locus of control' (cited in Carlson et al 2004) refers to whether one believes that the consequences of one's actions are determined or controlled by internal, person variables or by external, environmental variables, which in turn can give rise to a range of emotions or states of being in the 'holder' of the expectation, dependent on how we interpret what 'the gap' signifies to us subjectively. Following Ben-Zeev's perspective (2000) we assert that the emotion which arises from recognising a gap will be determined by two parameters – the level of achievement and fulfillment of expectation, and the responsibility (controllability) for that.

| | Level of fulfillment of expectation | |
|---|---|---|
| **Evaluation** | **Fulfilled expectation** | **Unfulfilled expectation** |
| **Subject's responsibility** | Pride | Disappointment |
| **Others' responsibility** | Gratitude | Anger |

It is critical that we recognise the important role that student expectations play within their learning experience and that we work to identify the key gaps and transitions and to acknowledge the subsequent emotions which have the potential to modify a student's approach to learning - from the level of self motivation and self confidence to the positive or negative quality of interactions with tutors. The vignette outlined earlier demonstrates how anger or disappointment grows from a gap between the expected and actual behaviour of a tutor. Moreover, when students interpret a situation to be unjust or feel that they have been treated in a wrongful way, there is a danger that they may also begin to feel insulted or humiliated. In both cases, they are likely to see the 'locus of control' as being outside of themselves – and modify their learning approach and the quality of interaction with whoever they deem to be responsible.

Students have to deal with more then just their own prior expectations. They also face gaps between the expectations of many others such as educational institutions, tutors, relatives or even potential employers. Each one of these parties has different and at times contradictory expectations. Once a gap is revealed it may lead to either an internal conflict which the student must struggle to resolve or to a conflict between the student and one of the other parties.

**What are tutors' expectations and what shapes them?**

Having examined the nature of student expectations along with the varied determinants that can contribute to the formation of expectations in students, we will now focus on tutors' expectations and try to identify potential loci of gaps between tutors' and students' expectations.

Tutors' expectations of students are often founded on the folk mythologies of the 'ideal student'; a construction formed by the amalgamation of the tutors' hopes and expectations and their desire for success in terms of the students' own development and performance. We want our students to succeed and we want to be proud of them. These desires lead inevitably to the search for perfection in our own projected forms of the ideal and the formation of the 'other'; those who demonstrate other characteristics, abilities or tendencies. In describing the ideal we look for the impossible, and we begin at a point where we are looking for those who most closely match our desires and probably ourselves. These models are culturally loaded in favour of a constructed notion of the masculinist, unencumbered affluent individual (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003).

The 'ideal student' would demonstrate that they are 'fit' in a Darwinian way to take up the subject the minute they enter into the world of higher education. They would be highly motivated and as passionate about their subject as their tutors. They would be totally dedicated to study, wanting to, and able to, spend every waking hour engaged in their disciplinary practice. This ideal has no family commitments or financial imperatives. Students who work part time in a supermarket or who have family commitments cannot match this ideal; thus revealing that these expectations already begin to discriminate against the very students we seek to attract. The ideal student would have rounded skills, excelling at every aspect of the modern art and design curriculum, able to write, argue, debate, articulate, present, negotiate, draw, create, invent, and innovate, all within the context of the current politico-social global environment and capable of adapting and changing as the fast changing modern world throws technologies and problems their way. Enter 'Superstudent'; as likely as a manifestation of the marvel comic heroes and heroines, but somewhere, underneath the realities of our own experience our hopes and expectations breed the impossible, moulded in our own form, but lacking the weaknesses we ourselves exhibited as students.

This ideal is mirrored too in the never ending lament of industry that we do not produce graduates who are ready and capable of entering into another social world, that of a specific place of work or professional role, fully formed and fully functioning, a superhero ready to take on the problems of the world in the coming century, and solve them.

In neither of these constructs of the ideal student is the notion of having to learn about the local and particular knowledge and ways of working of the social context they are moving into. Meaning is constructed through the context in which actions are carried out; the context of the action explicates the meaning. In this social constructivist approach to understanding human endeavour the student could be said to be, at both these points of transition, entering into a community of practice (Wenger 1998) where they will have to learn to move from the periphery to the centre (Lave and Wenger 1991) before they are able to contribute and change the practice itself, whether this is in education as a fully participating and collaborating student or in the world of work.

In our construction of 'the other' we move from the impossibility of perfection to the problematisation of lack or difference. This leads to discourses of student 'deficit' where the gap between the ideal and the other is increasingly emphasised. In this case no human can fulfil the desires or hopes of the projected ideal and we fall back on a notion or construction of 'the student' who is needy, deficient or culturally inadequate. These discourses can serve to present the student as the problem, rather than as we argue in this paper, focusing on the need to recognise and mediate the gaps in expectation and experience. We need to recognise that many students currently experience complex cultural transitions when they enter into higher education creative arts programmes. Traditionally we talk about inducting students into an art and design higher education environment. The term induction suggests that students need to adapt themselves to 'our ways of being and doing'. For some students, for those with the right cultural capital, this is not a problem, but for others the failure to adapt becomes 'their problem'. We want to reconceptualise induction as a series of participatory encounters throughout the whole journey of education and working life. We want to replace this inductive, linear model of experience and expectation with the notion of transitions; an exchange between tutor and student, rather than a moulding of the student to fit a uni-dimensional conception of the student.

And more than this, transitions happening at more than one point, which allow insights into ways of working and being in other cultural situations would enable such conceptions to be valued. For example more genuine interactions between school, FE/HE and industry should emphasise the fluidity and mutuality of engagement. In contemporary interactions we work at emphasising the linearity of experience and the

difference between our sectors, maintaining barriers and the rituals of rites of passage that these transition points emphasise.

The difficulties of articulating the essence of our practice based learning to others is common to any discipline at a level beyond the common experience we share through our schooling and our peripheral interactions with these in our everyday lives. It is relatively easy to talk about and to see technical skills and abilities, but much harder to explain the nature of knowledge that is generated through the visual and the artefactual. Harder still for those outside to see the complex web of the historic, the current and the socio-political strands that make up the discipline and the context of the practices that constitute those activities. In spite of the challenge we need to find ways to demonstrate, to bridge or to navigate the gaps evidenced in the transitions between the HEI and the worlds beyond.

Knowledge and knowing in art and design is complex and not readily rendered through text. Many practices develop ways of knowing through experience of the tactile, visual and spatial and these ways of knowing are illusive to those outside our community.

We do not question that to understand the language and the knowledge of particle physics requires long engagement with the theories and ideas of the discipline and art and design is the same. Simply because ways of communicating ‘knowledge’ in art and design is more visual, is linked to contextual debates in the discipline and less accessible to those who are not members of the community of practice (Wenger 1998) does not mean that knowledge does not exist, it is more diverse and more embedded in the practice, the doing, making and engaging in the social historical and technical world of the disciplines. Blackler (1995) refers to different ways of knowing and different types of knowledge, that might be inherent in organizations. These different ways of knowing can be embedded, encultured, embodied, encoded, and embrained, they are not simply about knowledge that is explicit, written and overt. Knowledge is situated within the practices and cultures of human activity and art and design and education are no different. Such dispersed and contextualised knowledge has been explored in graphic design by Logan (2006) where the kinds of language and metaphors used in education mirror those found in the practice of graphics in the industry. Such linkage between the use of language in practice and in education is not surprising if we consider the large

numbers of practitioner tutors engaged in education in this sector and it suggests that knowledge is generated and shared socially and is not contained within easily transferable formats such as text books.

The ways of knowing are built up through experience and through the pedagogies of art and design education. The centrality of ambiguity in the educational experience leads to disjunctions in expectations as we have described in the vignette above.

There are a number of key precepts central to art and design pedagogies within a western context. The first of these is the notion of personal development of the individual. Each person is required to develop their own personal response to the creation of ‘work’. In such circumstances the tutor acts as guide and facilitator, and in such a role it is an anathema to impose one’s own views of ‘the right solution’ to a design problem. There are many ‘right solutions’. However, there is an underlying opposite and often unspoken knowledge that some solutions are more ‘right’ than others, more successful and more innovative. Some ways of working are also considered to be inappropriate. These are challenging and difficult ways of knowing and are part of the culture of the course, the discipline and the current cultural context of the particular art or design practice. Hence there is an emphasis on students learning about and knowing the work of current practitioners and also the traditions and heritage of their practice. This is the knowledge of the context of making, the artefact and the commentary on such products that is the second key factor in the pedagogies of art and design. Knowledge is provisional, socially constructed and ever changing. In fashion, in multi-media design and in fine art it is essential to be familiar with the world of practice beyond academia.

The experiential knowledge of the practice is also important. Students learn through doing and making. They learn to practice and what it means to be a practitioner. Tutors who hold the conception of teaching as helping students to become practitioners spend more time with their students and intend them to experience what it means to be a practitioner (Drew and Williams 2002; Drew and Trigwell 2003). Such experiential knowledge is built up through learning about a range of processes and techniques, through experimentation, testing, trial and error. The students are expected to research, to independently explore a wide range of contextual factors relevant to the discipline and

to the project they are engaged in. However, what research means can be variable and students conceptions of research can limit them to reproducing strategies rather than holistic and expansive understandings of the role of research in the construction of individual, personal meanings in response to the brief (Shreeve, Bailey et al. 2003).

Engaging students is another fundamental concept of art and design pedagogies. In order to learn students have to 'engage' in the learning activities. This is active learning advocated by many theorists, student-centred, leading to deep approaches to learning as opposed to surface approaches (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). However, not all students experience engagement in the way intended and they do not approach their studies in the same way (Drew, Bailey et al.2002). For many students there is a conceptual gap between the way we teach, the way we intend our students to learn and the way they experience it.

Even though the material, the world of the made object is primary in our discipline we still require language to mediate the understandings that we construct around such artefacts. There has been a tendency in some situations to obscure rather than mediate understanding in such disciplines. Comments like, 'if I have to explain what I mean by 'fashion' then you do not understand what fashion is,' are not unknown in higher education. It is possible that we privilege ambiguity in art and design education. The ways of experiencing knowledge are not primarily through words and either through laziness or a sense of exclusivity it is possible to disenfranchise many learners. It is easy to forget that we have a very specific language in our practices and ambiguity can easily be replaced by poor communication. Having to explore verbally is also a central tenet of art and design education. The crit or critique is a social situation intended to engage students in the debate and evaluation of their work. Too often this can slide into an exposition of the tutor's views, but in most cases there is an expectation that the students will communicate their views and express opinions. One aspect of the crit is to enable students to learn an appropriate and discipline specific language of evaluation. They are learning to think and to act like practitioners, or educational practitioners. Vygotsky's (1981) view of language as the primary mediating artefact of social meaning exemplifies the importance of dialogue in teaching and learning. Tutors engage students constantly in discussion as part of their teaching, developing the ability in their students to speak and to understand the language of their particular practice. Failure to articulate

arguments, debates and difficult concepts that depend on broad contextual knowledge of the practice, obscures the workings of the discipline and turns the process of learning into a game that some students just don't get (Reid 2007). Those who are experienced practitioners can deal with the idea that there are many possible answers and many possible ways of working, within fuzzy boundaries. They are comfortable with the notion of 'provisional stabilities' (Saunders, Charlier et al. 2005) or with ambiguity.

**The futility of the unending search for clarity**

Our audit cultures have generated more and more writing about our courses and our educational practices. Both within and beyond the institution there is a pressure to make more explicit the nature of education and often a subtext that believes that because we lack the words to convincingly evoke these experiences then we lack rigour in our systems and practices. If we believe that there can only be a true understanding through the generation of the collaborative construction of meaning, then the 'tyranny of transparency' will continually fuel the gap between our expectations of the educational experience and the reality of our experience, whether at the point of transition into or out of higher education or the perceptions of 'stakeholders'.

Visser and Visser (2004), reporting on a project involving a multi-disciplinary team, argue that people now face an increasingly complex and ambiguous world. There is therefore a need to take ambiguity seriously and 'deliberately acknowledge and embrace it' rather than try to remove it. They explore the intersection of ambiguity and learning and draw a number of implications. Rather than avoid ambiguity teachers need to create situations where students have opportunities to negotiate ambiguity. They argue that people consider actions against a backdrop of their own lived experience and that different discourses means that words only have meaning in context. This creates a challenge when moving between discourse communities. They point out that degree of comfort with ambiguity is culturally specific and the importance of context in the design of each learning situation. Most contexts are complex and working through this complexity helps students learn to understand different perspectives and so better cope with ambiguity. This approach also recognises the need for a degree of courage in looking at the world from different perspectives and coaching each other to understand our conflicting perspectives and being able to co-exist with these different perspectives.

Barnett (2000) offers the metaconcept of 'supercomplexity' as a way of understanding the world as it is and argues that what graduates need is:

> *"(The) capacity to embrace multiple and conflicting frameworks and to offer their own positive interventions in that milieu" (p.167).*

We need, however, to take care with how we use the term ambiguity and what we claim for it. Gaver, Beaver and Benford (2003) argue that:

> *"ambiguity is a property of the interpretative relationship between people and artifacts. This distinguishes ambiguity from related concepts such as fuzziness or inconsistency; these are attributes of things, whereas ambiguity is an attribute of our interpretation of them. Things themselves are not inherently ambiguous. They may give rise to multiple interpretations depending on their precision, consistency and accuracy on the one hand, and the identity, motivations and expectations of an interpreter on the other". (p.235*)

Rowland argues that there are two different kinds of ambiguity and makes the distinction between vagueness and uncertainty (Rowland 2003). This allows us to differentiate between not taking the process far enough to identify the issues and possibilities (vagueness) and the recognition of multiplicity of routes and interpretations with porous boundaries (uncertainty). When we claim ambiguity, we must be sure this is not an excuse for under-developed thinking.

There is also a danger of inauthentic ambiguity where there is a discourse of acceptance of diverse outcomes but beneath is a hidden curriculum open only to the privileged few. If ability to cope with ambiguity is culturally specific then different forms of ambiguity are also socially and culturally constructed, often within a hierarchy of acceptability by the dominant group.

These issues are also highly relevant to the context of teaching International students. As Lask (cited in Carroll and Ryan 2005) points out 'in order to provide a relevant educational experience for all students in an environment that is supportive and inclusive

of all', you will need to be prepared to review and interrogate your own culture and values, you will need to be actively pursuing intercultural engagement with your students and within the discipline and seeking opportunities to learn about the national and cultural perspectives of others. Recent work around the subject of Internationalization has raised issues entirely appropriate to the search for gaps in cultural understanding and expectation that are relevant to all students regardless of culture, class or creed.

The need to develop 'meta cultural sensitivity' amongst both students and tutors is seen as a way of helping to devise strategies for dealing with students' sense of 'otherness' and to bridge gaps in expectations. Cultural sensitivity in this sense does not require the gathering of knowledge or facts about other cultural perspectives, but to develop sensitivity and understanding to a point where 'partners must be cognizant of their partner's cultural heritage and, must accord that heritage legitimacy in their dealings with one another' (Smith and Bond 1999). Rather than expect all our students to conform to our expectations we should be aware of their perspectives and expectations.

To be familiar with the world of practice in art and design HE in the UK means understanding its western context and traditions Students studying art and design in a host culture, often find commonly used phrases such as 'mark making', challenging and difficult, and often find that they are used in teaching without context or explanation. Mark making as an abstract form of expression deeply embedded in western modernist artistic practice may mean nothing to a learner whose cultural context for meaning in art and design is almost always symbolic and representational. If the modernist paradigm is the prime pedagogical value then it is likely to create dissonance in such learners and they may come to question knowledge and may challenge the tutor's authority. In an important study of cross cultural issues in teaching online the Australian Flexible Learning Framework produced a guide which pointed out that the pedagogic values embedded within the curricula in one culture may be culturally inappropriate to another, and may not fit students' 'world view' (McLoughlin and Oliver 1999). Whilst this study was based on on-line learning some of the findings seem entirely apt in the context of this chapter. The learner's 'world view' is the percipience that results from the individual's mental programmes which in turn are developed out of the ''patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting that every person carries within him or herself' (Hofstede 1991). If there is little cultural sensitivity in the tutor's pedagogy, all students

can be disadvantaged and feel disengaged with the education process. The diverse culture that the international student body represents also brings with it complex and contradictory understandings of globalization as it affects their individual and communal lives and experiences over time (Luke and Tuathail 1998). This multinational group may display many advantages of the privileged (e.g. the ability to pay the fees to study at Masters level overseas), but the growing availability of grants and support for international learners (who will often have a specific political purpose and an agenda closely aligned to the economy of their country) adds to the diversity of the student group at this level of learning. This provides a multi faceted mix of expectations which offers us tremendous opportunity to enhance our curricula and enrich art and design pedagogies for sustainable art and design curricula as we move forward.

Students who come from different traditions of practice, may also have different definitions of the subjects studied in art and design. Fashion in Ghana for example, does not necessarily divide the subject into the component parts, Fashion and Textiles. Fine art students from Nigeria may not see the point of the conceptual or the ironic when they will be going back home to an arts audience primed to inhabit the representational and narrative in visual arts practice. This will demand more than individual or collective tutor and student 'sensitivity' but quality assurance and bureaucratic systems which can cope with flexible definitions of subject areas and assessment methods that relate to and address cross and inter cultural issues and content.

As teachers we also have to consider appropriate sites for exploration of ambiguity at different levels. Do we throw our new students in at the deep end or do we scaffold activities that build towards our ultimate aim?

**Ways Forward**

Art and design learning tasks are by their very nature often ill-defined and open-ended and can be characterised as 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber 1973). By its very nature art and design activity has neither one correct end-result nor one way to get there and therefore can not be addressed by any linear pre-structured method (Cross 1984). Engaging with these open ended tasks forces students to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty and whilst experienced artists and designers expect this and even embrace ambiguity since they know that this incubation phase of 'not knowing what to do' is often

the origin of innovative ideas, many first year art and design students are not familiar with such a process. On the contrary all their previous experience brought them to expect clear goals with structured ways to achieve them. Tutors are therefore often expected by students (or as in the former vignette by the father) to clear the way for them by teaching techniques or thinking methods which will guarantee success in 'solving the problems' and therefore success on the course.

Bridging the gap between the expectations of students and those of tutors reveals a major challenge which we have to face. Not only are art and design tasks often ill-structured but also the process of teaching students to deal with these issues is uncertain and therefore can be described as a ‘wicked issue’ where the best approach is ’progressively to disengage from unsatisfactory practice’ (Watson 2000). Since art and design students learn mostly by doing then the tutor role is more that of a coach, facilitating the students capacity to deal with the ambiguous process, to reflect on it and to grow from that reflection. (Schön 1987)

In an educational environment where this pedagogy of ambiguity is the norm, tutors and institutions need to learn to acknowledge the nature and importance of students' and tutors’ expectations and to respond to them as part of the educational process.

Recognising students as individuals with a multitude of difference and a multitude of experiences to bring to higher education, rather than as the failed Superstudent hero who can never live up to our expectations has to be the way forward to enabling a meeting and understanding of worlds. We have to decrease the gap between unrealistic expectations generated through projections of unachievable goals or unintended exclusion from the world of education through art and design. We need to break down the isolation and the development of separate cultures through a greater participatory experience where more *meaningful* insights can permeate through all levels of art and design, from primary education through to the worlds of professional practice.

Such an approach should not try to 'manage' student expectations nor should it be obsessed with fulfilling every expectation. Instead the approach should be to encourage students and tutors to acknowledge each others expectations and to develop methods to enable both students and tutors to transition through the gaps in a positive, supported

way. This transition also needs to be facilitated through greater understanding about the educational process and purpose in relation to the world of professional practice. In a rapidly changing world our students need to be able to deal with ambiguity, to live and work through it and with it. Learning and experiment is at the heart of education and also creative practices. Graduates need to be able to adapt, innovate and see the creative potential in a world we can only imagine and industries need to recognize that we have a dual role in facilitating those abilities.

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